

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of mental status examination while performing an automated diagnostic consultation using an automated medical advice or diagnostic system including a computing device and input and output devices, the method comprising:

 prestoring a plurality of questions and corresponding expected answers in a computing device memory;

 automatically asking a patient a one of the plurality of prestored questions;

 automatically comparing the answer to a corresponding prestored expected answer;

 automatically ascribing a score to a result of the comparison; and

 automatically comparing the score to a predetermined threshold value so as to determine a mental status of the patient.

2. The method defined in Claim 1, wherein the mental status examination takes place during a telephone consultation.

3. The method defined in Claim 2, additionally comprising transferring the telephone consultation with the patient to a medical staff person if the threshold value is not achieved and an assistant for the patient is not available.

4. The method defined in Claim 1, additionally comprising providing situation-specific advice to the patient if the threshold value is not achieved.

5. The method defined in Claim 1, additionally comprising continuing an automated diagnostic consultation if the threshold value is achieved.

6. The method defined in Claim 5, wherein continuing the automated diagnostic consultation includes collecting medical information from the patient.

7. The method defined in Claim 6, wherein new medical information collected for the patient is added to a patient's past medical history file at the completion of the automated diagnostic consultation.

8. The method defined in Claim 5, wherein continuing the automated diagnostic consultation occurs when an assistant for the patient is available and logs into an automated medical advice or diagnostic system.

9. The method defined in Claim 1, wherein a determination of mental status of the patient is invoked in an automated diagnostic consultation for a medical problem whose presentation can include an altered level of consciousness.

10. An automated medical advice or diagnostic system configured to conduct a mental status examination while performing an automated diagnostic, the system comprising:

storage means for prestoring a plurality of questions and corresponding expected answers;

means for automatically asking a patient a one of the plurality of prestored questions;

means for automatically comparing the answer to a corresponding prestored expected answer;

means for automatically ascribing a score to a result of the comparison; and

means for automatically comparing the score to a predetermined threshold value so as to determine a mental status of the patient.

11. The system defined in Claim 10, additionally comprising means for providing situation-specific advice to the patient if the threshold value is not achieved.

12. An automated medical advice or diagnostic system configured to conduct a mental status examination while performing an automated diagnosis, the system comprising:

- a computing device;
- a storage associated with the computing device configured to prestore a plurality of questions and corresponding expected answers; and
- a software program executed on the computing device and configured to
 - automatically ask a patient a one of the plurality of prestored questions,
 - automatically compare the answer to a corresponding prestored expected answer,
 - automatically ascribe a score to a result of the comparison, and
 - automatically compare the score to a predetermined threshold value so as to determine a mental status of the patient.

13. The system defined in Claim 12, wherein the software program is additionally configured to provide situation-specific advice to the patient if the threshold value is not achieved.

14. A method of mental status examination, using an automated medical advice or diagnostic system including a computing device and input and output devices, the method comprising:

- automatically providing a patient an item of information prestored in a computing device memory;
- automatically waiting a predetermined time interval;
- automatically asking the patient about the item of information;
- automatically comparing an answer from the patient to a prestored expected answer; and
- automatically evaluating a mental status of a patient based on the comparison.

15. The method defined in Claim 14, additionally comprising resuming system operation if the results from the mental status evaluation match.

16. The method defined in Claim 14, additionally comprising terminating system operation with the patient based on the mental status of the patient if the results from the mental status evaluation do not match.

17. The method defined in Claim 14, wherein the method of mental status examination is randomly invoked by the system.

18. A method of mental status examination, using an automated medical advice or diagnostic system including a computing device and input and output devices, the method comprising:

- automatically asking a patient for an item of information, wherein a first request for the item of information is prestored in a computing device memory;
- automatically receiving a first answer;
- automatically waiting a predetermined time interval;
- automatically asking the patient about the item of information in a different manner, wherein a second request for the item of information is prestored in the computing device memory;
- automatically receiving a second answer;
- automatically comparing the first answer to the second answer; and
- automatically evaluating mental status of a patient based on the comparison.

19. The method defined in Claim 18, additionally comprising resuming system operation if the results from the mental status evaluation are consistent.

20. The method defined in Claim 18, additionally comprising terminating system operation with the patient based on a mental status of the patient if the results from the mental status evaluation are not consistent.

21. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the first request and the second request are similar.

22. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the first request and the second request are different.

23. An automated medical advice or diagnostic system configured to conduct a mental status examination while performing an automated diagnosis of a patient, the system comprising:

- storage means for automatically providing a patient an item of prestored information;

- means for automatically waiting a predetermined time interval;

- means for automatically asking the patient about the item of information;

- means for automatically comparing an answer from the patient about the item of information to the prestored information; and

- means for automatically evaluating a mental status of a patient based on the comparison.

24. The system defined in Claim 23, additionally comprising means for resuming system operation if the results from the mental status evaluation match.

25. The system defined in Claim 23, additionally comprising means for terminating system operation with the patient based on the mental status of the patient if the results from the mental status evaluation do not match.

26. An automated medical advice or diagnostic system configured to conduct a mental status examination while performing an automated diagnosis of a patient, the system comprising:

a computing device;

a storage associated with the computing device configured to prestore an item of information; and

a software program executed on the computing device and configured to

automatically provide a patient the item of prestored information,

automatically wait a predetermined time interval,

automatically ask the patient about the item of information,

automatically compare an answer from the patient about the item of information to the prestored information, and

automatically evaluate a mental status of a patient based on the comparison.

27. The system defined in Claim 26, wherein the software program is additionally configured to resume system operation if the results from the mental status evaluation match.

28. The system defined in Claim 26, wherein the software program is additionally configured to terminate system operation with the patient based on the mental status of the patient if the results from the mental status evaluation do not match.

29. An automated medical advice or diagnostic system configured to conduct a mental status examination while performing an automated diagnosis of a patient, the system comprising:

means for automatically asking a patient for an item of information, wherein a first request for the item of information is prestored in a computing device memory;

means for automatically receiving a first answer;

means for automatically waiting a predetermined time interval;

means for automatically asking the patient about the item of information in a different manner, wherein a second request for the item of information is prestored in the computing device memory;

means for automatically receiving a second answer;

means for automatically comparing the first answer to the second answer; and

means for automatically evaluating mental status of a patient based on the comparison.

30. The system defined in Claim 29, additionally comprising means for resuming system operation if the results from the mental status evaluation are consistent.

31. The system defined in Claim 29, additionally comprising means for terminating system operation with the patient based on a mental status of the patient if the results from the mental status evaluation are not consistent.

32. The system defined in Claim 29, wherein the first request and the second request are similar.

33. The system defined in Claim 29, wherein the first request and the second request are different.